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Sea Monsters. Theoretical Perspectives

NICOLAE BOBARU
Independent Researcher
bobaru.nicolae@gmail.com

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Fictional works that are centered on elements pertaining to the maritime imaginary are established around individual figures as those of the sea monsters. They express terror and instinctive repulsion. By associating the sea monsters with the waves, one can argue that, for instance, the malignant representations of the mermaid – wave is the animation of the sea water, same as the waving of mermaid's hair represents an animation of her seductive power – evoke seafarers' phantasmas connected to the image of a fatal woman.

Saint Augustin defined the monster as a deviation from the norm. Therefore, monster can be seen as the Other, as the alterity of the human condition. In the medieval period, man was terrified by the immensity of the maritime spaces, and this feeling was reflected in stories about sea monsters, but the development of the maritime field made that terror be transformed in curiosity.

In the present essay we'll focus on the development of the theories related to sea monsters and we'll argue that these monsters are nothing but ways in which we perceive the world around us and demand us to reassess our cultural assumptions towards differences and force us to tolerate any forms of expression.

From the *Old Testament* Leviathan to the 19th century kraken, sea monsters mark maritime spaces with their terrifying presences. They often get dangerous, even evil; and on the other hand, under many aspects, they inspire fear and predict misfortunes. From ancient times, the sea inspired the greatest fears to human beings, causing a sense of reluctance among people.

In Antiquity, the sea was regarded as the edge of the known world, where the divine, the human and the animal mix one with each other, where myth and reality were inextricably blending together. So, the ancient man downgraded the ocean to the outskirts of his universe, and inside these maritime borders there could be found the ends of the earth. And so, where humans could not reach up with their sight, the imagination found a prosperous land to give birth to monsters, for they are literally the product of the environment that hosts them.

In the Middle Ages, for Christian Europe, the Atlantic Ocean constituted a terrifying bordering area. Isidore of Seville described it as "incommensurable and underestimated"[1] (Randles, 1989: 6), and in this sense, Pillars of Hercules, located in today's Gibraltar Strait, symbolized these limits. It can be noticed that in the Middle Ages, the Atlantic Ocean represented a border in people's imagination (Del Castillo, 1991: 15-25). And if it represented the borders of the known world, imagination would enrich it with different creatures, some of those being more frightening than others. Sometimes the oceanic space was seen as a vestige of the flood, as a relic of a catastrophe, a liquid space without landmarks, a picture of the infinite, disorder, chaos, and consequently a landmark for monsters (Corbin, 1988: 12). Other times, the sea was seen as a demonic space, being presented as the chaotic part of the world, favourable to the proliferation of monstrous creatures.

[1]"de l'incommensurable et de l'infrancissable" (our translation).

As it is well known, their presences are closely related to the unknown character of these geographical spaces. Monsters actually define a spatial reality that escapes human knowledge and materialize themselves thanks to human imagination. Miraculousness unfolds beyond the limits of the oceans, facing the void. If the waves of the ocean are often considered dangerous, they can paradoxically shelter a heavenly refuge, too. Thus, in the 6th century AD, abbot Brendan of Clonfert initiated a voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in search of the Islands of Happiness and Fortune. The story of his voyage – *Navigatio Sanci Brendani Abbatis* – contributed to the spread of the mythical image of the Atlantic Ocean in the Middle Ages. So, the maritime space represents the birth place of limitless imagination. Escaping from the domination of man, this unknown space hosts both monstrous and diabolical creatures and paradisiac places. In fact, it can be argued that during the Middle Ages, man ambiguously glanced at the seas and oceans which were disputed by the forces of good and evil. It is equally considered as an empire of evil and misfortune, but also a source of happiness and riches (Villain-Gandossi, 2004: 75). In the light of this antagonism, we must place the perception of maritime space at the end of the 15th century, when the first transatlantic voyages took place, when the first sea monsters came to life, reflecting a mythical, biblical, but also eschatological perception of the ocean.

Sea monsters – embodiments of danger in the Middle Ages – represented truly these spaces due to the mixture between knowledge inherited from Antiquity as well as from their Christian interpretations. Consequently, all creatures that dwell at the ends of the world, as the Atlantic Ocean was considered to be, remind us of the mermaids from Antiquity, but described in a devilish vision. Isidore of Sevilla, in his *Etymologiae* (or *Originum sive etymologiarum libri viginti*) devotes forty-four articles to aquatic fauna. He refers to the whale as "this huge beast"[2] (Voisenet, 2000: 110-111), and he speaks even about sea dragons and mermaids (Cazenave, 2007: 162). Whether they are the image of sin or danger, their symbolism perfectly reflects the analogy between the sea and death.

When Christopher Columbus started his voyage over the Atlantic Ocean in 1492, his imaginary was invaded by more or less fantastic travel stories in which reality and magic homogeneously blended. The stories about mermaids couldn't be missing, because, as it is mentioned by C.-C. Kappler: "Who did not see monsters, did not navigate"[3] (Kappler, 1999: 115). Thus, on January 9, 1493, Columbus saw three mermaids near the coasts of Hispaniola Island, but he expressed his deception about them: "they were not so beautiful as they are described, for in a way, their faces resembled a man's face"[4] (Sánchez, 1996: 112). Columbus, however, a pretty pragmatic man, was not very interested in the subject, his writings focusing on much more technical issues of navigation. Of course, the maritime imaginary is imbued with fabulous stories, and of course, the perception of the maritime space is determined by the biblical tradition and the ancient myths. And yet, the space dedicated to sea monsters is not too vast. It is true that Christopher Columbus reported in his journal another episode in which he claimed to have fished a large sea pig, whose body was covered with fish scales. The animal was described as follows: "A fish (...) that seemed to be a pig covered with fish scales"[5] (Kappler, 1999: 196), becomes the representation of a frightening creature. Bernard Huevelmans and Gilbert Lascaut claim that language is decisive in the construction of sea

[2] "cette bête d'immense taille".

[3] "qui n'a pas vu de monstres n'a pas voyagé".

[4] "no eran tan hermosas como las pintan, que en alguna manera tenían forma de hombre la cara".

[5] "un pez [...] que parecía proprio puerco [...] que era toda concha tiesta ...".

monsters. The poverty of vocabulary and the unceasing need for analogies with the known world determines the authors of voyage logs to describe an unknown animal by dismembering it piece by piece to be able to compare it to a being already known, and this determines the reader to imagine a composite creature that hardly resembles with what the traveller would have seen. Therefore, the hybridity of the monster results in this case from the inappropriate use of the vocabulary.

Despite the progress of the real world, fiction manages to survive by mixing the reported deeds with authentic stories. Sea monsters portrayed without any doubt the dangers that were undergone by the seamen and they were marking by their presence the limits of that space, which had been unknown up to that moment. Sea monsters and their continuous occurrences have been functioning for a long time as a warning for the man who wanted to venture into the unknown. Their presence continues to signal the high degree of danger of the seas and oceans, indicating their almost bestial character, but also the importance of the wonderful result of the medieval imagination, which really refuses to vanish. Finally, their presence is part of a well-defined iconographic system of representations at that time. The reason for decorating of these empty spaces with monsters is not the simple ornamentation, but rather is the reflection of persistent fantasies or anxiety resulting from the mix of unknown with danger.

The fear of the unknown that is materialized in the occurrence of sea monsters is definitively a reflection of many inner fears at that time: the fear of loss of physical integrity or the fear of punishment for various behaviours. The seafarer of the 16th and 17th centuries was actually confronting those ancestral terrors strictly related to the representations of the world and therefore those of the seas and oceans. Because the sea conceals a demonic and diluvian character, seafarers who ventured at sea, exposed themselves to various dangers. Sea monsters, true incarnations of those fears, materialized these torments. These representations of social disorder and cosmic chaos actually offer a projection of the forces that threaten human being both from the outside and inside (Cazenave, 1979: 235). It is also important to notice that in the actual travel accounts based on maritime experiences, monsters originating in biblical or antique imaginary are not mentioned. However, other monsters, real monsters this time, are successfully making their appearance. These are creatures from the animal kingdom whose surprising nature places them in the category of monsters – sharks, whales or octopuses.

The observations of many religious missionaries and seafarers who have crossed the oceans, reveal their fear, but at the same time the morbid curiosity triggered by these marine animals. Thus, they were characterized as phantasmagorical and cruel, so these marine species are presented as emblematic creatures, acknowledged due to their savageness.

The cruel, even bestial, character of the sea, is perfectly reflected by the images of these aquatic creatures. The sea is equally defined as monstrous, as, for example, it swallowed its victims in the same way a monster swallowed its prey. And, in fact, men fear the great devouring sea, which is directly associated with death. Therefore, the liquid element is assimilated with a force capable of swallowing beings. The sea, with its cruelty, appears as a representation of a destructive will, and is also the image of a personified monster.

In conclusion, if the sea monsters appear on navigation charts or in travel accounts, it is mainly due to their meanings. They reveal the wonderful and unknown character of maritime spaces, materializing man's fears, which are closely related to it. But over the centuries, maritime experience has strengthened, and the oceanic crossings became a reality. In the 16th century, then in the 17th century, the expansion of the great European powers, the christening

of the New World and, lastly, good seamanship slowly changed human perception of maritime spaces.

If the sea still assumes a terrifying character, the Christian church undertakes an evangelization of maritime limits, giving them a sacred and much more soothing dimension (Cabantous, 2002: 172). Now, before the oceanic crossings, the ships are baptized and there are organized religious masses before each sea expedition. If in old days the spilled blood of a sacrificed ram on the ship's deck was meant to protect it during the voyage, the holly water is now used the same way for its magical functions (Le Pohon, 1981: 56).

The evangelization of the limits of maritime spaces and, later, naturalistic theology offers a vision of the deep which is lacking sea monsters (Cazenave, 1979: 250). Now the oceans are under the protection of the heavenly characters. The ocean seems, therefore, inhabited by their celestial figures, and the dominant Christianity offers all its comforting protection. Not only charted navigation routes are marked with saints and holy figures, opening and protecting those routes, but they are also encircling the monsters who are meant to disappear.

The wild world of the deep, its bestiality and its diabolical spirit are thus minimized under the influence of Christianity, which conquers and dominates the ocean spaces that otherwise were consecrated to the tenebrous monsters. Finally, if monsters tend to disappear, it is mainly due to scientific, technical and cartographic progress. Indeed, ocean explorations end up revealing their non-existence, and those marine monsters join the other mythical creatures in the pantheon of legends and myths. Thus, the magic and the unreal are gradually detached from the real, and knowledge based on nature observation dissociates monstrosity from other demonic features (Cazenave, 1979: 250). However, even if navigation further pushes the geographic limits of the known world, the presence of sea monsters is less and less brought into discussion. As it could be seen, they embody the dangers of the oceans, but all these problems do not disappear, and that is why the church invested in these hostile marine landscapes, marking these spaces with its presence meant to inspire peace and confidence for all who were at sea.

It should be clarified, however, that sea monsters continue to exist in the folklore of the 18th and the 19th centuries. Their presences, such as the occurrences of krakens or mermaids over time, demonstrate in fact to what extent the marine universe remains fundamentally hostile to man (Geistdoerfer, 2002: 53). Despite the technical and maritime progress, the sea world inspires even today the biggest human fears. Undoubtedly, monsters reflect this eschatological concern that is inseparable from the analogy established between death and sea. Indeed, they embody the anxiety caused by the fear of disappearance of the physical body in the oceans, problematizing another more important issue – the human nature.

Sea serpents have made their way in literature through a work written in the style of *The Arabian Nights – Pacha of Many Tales* (1835) by Frederick Marryat. In *The Fourth Voyage of Huckaback*, the storyteller is aboard a ship hit by a hurricane which is drifting in the Caribbean area under the influence of ocean currents. Its crew is attacked by a thirty-meter-long sea serpent, who swallows a crew member at a time. But the beast is finally driven away by using a broom soaked in tar.

But, perhaps the most famous and genuine sea monster dating from the times when Marryat wrote his novels, remains Mocha Dick, a huge white whale from the Cape Horn, which is supposed to have successfully escaped from a hundred attempts to be caught or killed. Jeremiah Reynolds reported the defeat of Mocha Dick in *Knickerbocker Magazine* in May 1839, and this story inspired Herman Melville to write *Moby-Dick* in 1851. Thus, the whale becomes

the emblem of a symbolical adventure for life and death, a picture often evoked by the vastness of the maritime space.

Victor Hugo brilliantly describes the meeting with a kraken called a devilfish in *Toilers of the Sea* (*Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, 1866), which appears near the islands in the English Channel. But the work that has encouraged the interest in the monsters of the deep was *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Seas* (*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*, 1869-1870) by Jules Verne. He uses the fear of sea monsters at the beginning of the novel, when Captain Nemo's submarine, Nautilus, attacks other ships like a creature of the deep. He says: "The human mind enjoys grandiose conceptions of supernatural beings. Now the sea is their best vehicle, for it is the only environment which can produce and develop such giants: beside them the land animals, the elephants or rhinoceroses, are mere dwarfs" (Verne, 1998: 14). When the explorers approached what is proven to be the ruins of Atlantis, the narrator remarks "the eyes of huge crustaceans lurking in their dens, of gigantic lobsters standing to attention like halberdiers and waving their legs with metallic clanks, of titanic crabs set like cannon on their mounts, and of awe-inspiring squid twisting their tentacles into a living brush of snakes" (Verne, 1998: 259).

Verne's novel is full of such miracles, and, though, none of his creatures is supernatural, they are just as scary as any legendary monster, and both the giant squid, and the sea serpent, which he mentions, have become real features representative for his work. Authors had to be very creative to give life to stories with sea monsters. In *The Water-Devil* (1874), Frank R. Stockton reveals that the underwater monster that seemed to attack ships in a particular location was actually a magnetic sea mountain. In *The Rival Beauties* (1895), W.W. Jacobs describes a sea serpent that gets scared by the fog signals issued by a ship's horn system. Subsequently, Ray Bradbury transformed this idea into *The Fog Horn* (1951), where a large sea serpent is attracted by the sounds emitted by a lighthouse. In *The Sea Raiders* (1896), H.G. Wells described an episode where some tourists on the South Devon coast are suddenly threatened by a sudden attack initiated by a group of huge octopuses*, Haplotenthis Ferox*, as he calls them, which disappear as mysteriously as they appeared.

Sea serpents and krakens will continue to show up in fiction for many years, so John Wyndham uses their images for an alien being in the ocean waters in *The Kraken Wakes* (1953), his novel being representative for a new wave of monsters coming out of post-atomic waters, the most important being Gojira or Godzilla. This and other imitations from 1950-1960, presented mostly post-atomic mutations, and though they are clear evidences that the ocean is the habitat for many huge monsters, they are not the same as the mythical monsters. Two authors can be considered responsible for recovering the figure of the sea monster in two distinctive ways in the early 20th century and, by doing so, they refreshed and revived this concept for the generations to come. Those two authors were William Hope Hodgson and H.P. Lovecraft. Hodgson spent seven years on board commercial vessels (1891-1898), traveling several times around the world. His experiences served as a basis for numerous novellas and two of his novels. His writings are the real proof of a rich imagination that bypassed the traditional superstitions about sea monsters. Undoubtedly, the hours he had spent in the night during his bridge watches offered him the necessary time to speculate in relation to marine fauna. His first horror story – *Tropical Horror* (1905), although it does not have a very well-defined aesthetic form, can be seen as such nocturnal meditation. A ship is threatened by a giant sea serpent from whose mouth many tentacles came out. Obviously, it is not an ordinary sea serpent. It also has a huge claw, same as a lobster, by which it crushes whatever comes out in its way. In *The Voice in The Night* (1907), the crew of a ship that is heading towards an area

patched in fog, hears about the story of two shipwrecked passengers on an island infested with some species of mushrooms, and find out they have been contacted that same disease. In *The Stone Ship* (1914), an underwater volcanic eruption brings out an ancient ship that has been petrified, but it is also the shelter for several creatures of the deep, including huge sea cucumbers and giant eels.

More recent stories centred on sea monsters are rewritings of other texts, with just a few original touches. *The Rig* (1966) by Chris Boyce presents a gigantic sea plant that grows and invades an oil rig. In *The Shark God* (1940), A.E. Van Vogt describes a shark god who takes human form to intervene in the local shark massacre, but it discovers that its human form has its limitations. Sharks, particularly, the big white, were the cause of this big return, which is underlined by the success of *Jaws* (1974) by Peter Benchley. There is nothing supernatural in his novel, but the action and suspense offer the same thrills that any other mythical sea monster would have provided.

The Loch (2005) by Steven Alten forms a connection between the Sargasso Sea, where the main character faces a huge squid, and Loch Ness, where he has to confront with an old enemy from his childhood. The monster of Loch Ness is one of the most famous aquatic monsters, but most often it appears in children's stories such as *The Water Horse* (1990) by Dick King-Smith and *The Boggart and The Monster* (1997) by Susan Cooper.

The status of the monster in the postmodern literature and theory changes, as the monster as it is perceived in a traditional sense (i.e. as an Other feared by humans) is largely absent in postmodern literature. This is mostly happening due to the fact that the defining features of monstrosity – hybridity, excess and evasion of representation, otherwise perceived grotesque and scary – are celebrated in postmodernism as dissonant elements that may accordingly lead to "genuine heterogeneity" (Benjamin, 1991: 210), in the context of postmodernism, the idea of excess in representation defines the standard or the norm. Through postmodern theories, the concept of alterity and the Other are radically outsourced as an *absolute Other*. Representation is possible, but only as re-presentation, in other words, work itself is always framed by a series of referents that always lose their value and block any sense of pure perception. This approach is supported by Lyotard and Baudrillard's ideas who stressed the issue of real and image that define postmodern literary discourses. As such, monsters from postmodernist fiction are not the subject of fear or of any manifestations of sufferings at the psychological level, and they are the emblem of rejection of the great narratives and are related to the considerations of self-consciousness of self-presentation.

Highlighting the absence of those types of monsters that are causing fear in postmodern fictions does not equate their lack of relevance to postmodern theories. The concept of monster is widely discussed in poststructuralist theoretical discourse, in full compliance with the conditions of postmodern culture. Derrida proposes that, in the preparations for the future, we must encounter the monster and includes the idea of monstrosity in the ethics of hospitality (Derrida, 2000: 89). Foucault suggests that monsters are an inherent part of the "order of things" (2005: 169-171); that they aren't hybrids or other kind of figures, but examples of "metamorphoses of the prototype" (169), which are natural and essential for the evolutionary transition to adjacent forms (171).

In the latest evolutionary theories, the idea of evolutionary continuum is completed, at certain points, by the emergence of certain types of monsters – organic beings that do not match the natural order. This is postulated in Gould's writings as well as in Foucault's texts. According to the latter, "the proliferation of monsters without a future is necessary to enable

us to work down again from the continuum" (2005: 170). He admits that "as we move in one direction, as a drama of the earth and waters must be construed, in the other direction, as an obvious observation of forms" (Foucault, 2005: 170) and so "the monster ensures the emergence of difference" (171).

Donna Haraway's postmodern feminism is born of a similar position regarding alterity and monstrosity. Writing in a postmodern world that is comparable to the "the womb of a pregnant monster" (Haraway, 1992: 295), she claims that the Other is constantly determined, classified and frequently removed from society and culture. Those who are not apprehensible because of differences are considered obstacles to progress and as such are inadequate to support this progress. Same as Foucault, Haraway promotes an approach that has the ability to turn culture into the process of acceptance of alterity as a vehicle for change and adaptation. In her essay – *The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others* – she notes that scientific research defines culture and identity. The identified monster insists on fixed categories and the ethics of practice, as well as the construction of "structured inequality" (Haraway, 1992: 232).

Based on such ideas, postmodernism, in literature and theory, promotes a world without categorizations and validations, insisting on border crossing points between categories and excess identity. Postmodern monsters are thus, at least to a certain extent, those "hopeful monsters" that Tony E. Jackson was mentioning in his work – *Charles and the Hopeful Monster: Postmodern Evolutionary Theory in "The French Lieutenant's Woman"*.

Monsters from postmodernist fiction reflect postmodern theoretical outlook on monsters and their relationships with the norm. Occasionally, in postmodern literature, it can be seen that monsters behave themselves as postmodern expressions of carnivalesque and grotesque, offering elements for socio-literary comments and criticism, as an excess against which the structures of society are founded. Often, these monsters deviate from the conventional notions of alterity and they don't present themselves as fictional characters. They draw attention to their own textual status in the literary works. Such monsters are part of a literary effort that is conscious of the theoretical aspects and the self, and is meant to comment on the representation of alterity and difference and the potential to transgress the predictable limits of the narrative.

Directly connected to postmodern auto reflexiveness, the presence of the monster is obviously part of the narrative crisis. The case of the author in the context of postmodernity consists in the fact that there is an obligation with regards to the repletion of previous forms. The presence of the monster is therefore a challenge for the idea that its representations are only possible at the level of the repetitions of older monsters. So, the presence of the monster can be considered as a self-conscious criticism of the representation of the monstrosity in a direct relationship with the postmodern crisis of reality, identity and representation.

The sea continues to be perceived as a chaotic and uncontrollable space in which there is no sense of order. It represents an equally chaotic and disordered past, as well as the uncontrollable functioning of memory. Such a construction of the maritime space is obvious in Iris Murdoch's novel *The Sea, The Sea* (1978), where the dangers inherent to the oceans are represented by a sea monster.

The evolution of the novel prefigures itself from Charles's initial meditations about the sea, as he was wondering about it and showing his ownership over it. His past will also prove to be firm and strong as the sea, showing him that past can still cause harm to someone, which is reflected in the character's fight to get out of the water. There is a strong impact of a series

of events offered by the "horrible experience" (Murdoch, 1978: 24) that interrupts Charles's story. He reveals that an extremely unusual presence has caused him suffering: "I was sitting, with the notebook beside me (...). I had been looking intently into a rock pool and watching a remarkably long, reddish faintly bristly sea-worm (…) *I saw a monster rising from the waves*" (23).

A snake-like monster that will appear later at a crucial moment of the narrative, was interpreted by critics in different ways: as a representation of Charles's fear of female sexuality (Dipple, 1982: 278; Tucker, 1986: 382), his subconscious, his possessiveness and uncontrolled jealousy (Conradi, 1986: 245), as well as his failure to "signify the traumatic kernel at the heart of the real" (Nicol, 2004: 138).

Despite the accuracy of these interpretations, a further understanding is possible: the sea monster represents the unpleasant events of Charles's past which he wishes to control and suppress from his autobiography, but which will eventually overwhelm him. His attempts to find a logical explanation for this presence – he attributes it to an LSD consumption or to an optical illusion – reflects his desire to find explanations for his past and to eliminate the unpleasant events from it. These attempts also highlight his failure as an author of an autobiography. But the sea, same as the past, has spots where it is deep and it hides monsters which he will later need to confront.

Charles's falling into the sea can be interpreted as a strong advice that he should eventually face his past mistakes, instead of passing them into a glossary of his memory, and it is not surprising that what he discovers in the cauldron is precisely the monster from his past: "The monstrous sea serpent had actually been in the cauldron with me" (Murdoch, 1978: 350). The sea serpent embodies Arrowby's continuous frustration to wipe off his sins from his autobiography. But this past is equally unstable as the sea is, and his cleansing attempts of the past prove ineffective, for the past he wants to control draws him in the depths of memory, where the monsters are watching him.

As a whole, the anthropological approach is highlighted as a solid test to understand the cultural significance of monster's alterity: the difference which, at certain times, separates the monster from man and which charges it with negativity. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen claims that monsters can allow us to find out about the cultures in which they were generated (Cohen, 1996: 3). He argues that "monsters are the embodiment of a cultural moment" (4). To some extent this can be true. Undoubtedly, monsters affect a certain culture in the responses it generates and also with regards to the way how they are built in the pre-existing systems of the respective culture.

However, not the monster itself, but the systematic characterization of the monster in a particular culture, reflects the fears and social anxieties and reveals a cultural moment. The monster itself runs away from our natural control, but a part of it is left behind to mirror the elementary fears and anxieties that appeared at the time of meeting monstrosity.

Following the idea that monsters are culturally and historically specific, J.J. Cohen also claims that, in spite of it "the monster itself turns immaterial and vanishes, to reappear somewhere else" (Cohen, 1996: 4). Through this statement, he claims the evasive nature of the monster, for it exceeds both the tangible form and its representation.

This cultural and historical specificity is significantly highlighted in J.M. Coetzee's novel *Foe*, where Foe mentions the wreck of the ship carrying slaves in the same context with the image of a kraken:

> Those great beds of seaweed are the home of a beast called by mariners the *kraken* […] which has arms as thick as a man's thigh and many yards long, and a beak like an eagle's. I picture the kraken lying on the floor of the sea, staring up through tangled fronds of weeds at the sky, its many arms furled about it, waiting. It is into the terrible orbit that Friday steers his fragile craft. (2010: 140)

Through this image, slavery could be understood, on the one hand, as a terrible thing, a monstrosity that is hiding deep under the surface of the water: "If the kraken lurks anywhere, it lurks here, watching out of its stony hooded undersea eyes" (Coetzee, 2010: 156). And since this kraken is a dangerous monster, which must be left untouched, the image could be understood, on the other hand, as Foe's fear to face the terrible truth of colonial history, which could be put in direct connection with Susan's fear of "monsters of the deep" (11). Foe and Susan feel compelled to save Friday's past from the depths, considering it is their duty to jump into the sea and immerse into the past:

> Friday rows his log of wood across the dark pupil – or the dead socket – of an eye staring up at him from the floor of the sea. He rows across it and is safe. To us he leaves the task of descending into that eye. Otherwise, like him, we sail across the surface and come ashore none the wiser, and resume our old lives, and sleep without dreaming, like babes. (141)

However, neither Susan nor Foe are willing to plunge into the sea. Thus, Susan wonders:

> But who will do it? […] It is easy enough to lie in bed and say what must be done, but who will dive into the wreck? On the island I told Cruso it should be Friday, with a rope about his middle for safety. But if Friday cannot tell us what to see, is Friday in my story any more than a figuring (or pre-figuring) of another diver? (142)

The kraken is part of the European mythological heritage and, therefore, it belongs to the Western literary tradition, same as Susan Barton and Foe in Coetzee's novel. They translate Friday in accordance with Eurocentric thinking systems that are not familiar with his Afrocentric understanding. But alterity is well received, despite the fact that it proves itself unable to give it a symbolic sense. The dark alterity remains dark (the kraken, the place where the boat was shipwrecked, Friday), but the phobic undesirability transmitted by these signifiers has transformed itself into familiarity, their binary antagonism being reconciled.

Monsters represent illusions of the human mind. They can be pushed towards the farthest geographical limits and the boundaries of discourse, they can be hidden at the edge of the world and in the depths of our mind, but they always come back. And every time they do it, not only they bring a complete knowledge of our place in history, but they also carry a self-knowledge and a discourse that was born throughout alterity. These monsters are nothing but ways in which we perceive the world around us and demand us to reassess our cultural assumptions towards differences and force us to tolerate any forms of expression.

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